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ABSTRACT

The reasons given for the apparent decline in family well-being include weakened family values, poor parenting, detrimental behavior of parents and young people, and social and economic forces in the larger society that make it difficult for families to perform their functions well. So great is the concern that some observers are convinced that the family as we know it is "falling apart." The truth is, though, that most families are trying to do well by their children in a difficult time. This report describes the situation of families in the United States in the 1990s, using statistical data, and explores three challenges that families with children currently face as they attempt to fulfill some of the functions that society expects of them. The three challenges are: (1) making ends meet in a changing economy; (2) combating negative peer influences; and (3) maintaining parental control as children grow older. The first three chapters of the report explore each of these challenges in depth. The fourth chapter discusses states and cities as environments for families with children. The fifth chapter examines what can be done to help families, including the role of government programs and partnerships between schools and families. Several themes recur throughout the book: though family structure may affect the degree of risk, how a family functions is a more important indicator of its health than structure; a single risk factor is not as significant as multiple factors; and to function, families need the support and cooperation of their communities and other institutions. (HTH)

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